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## Learning in the Age of Mobilism

The United States risks falling behind countries like Korea in this new era.



\* IN 2008 FOR THE FIRST TIME, laptops outsold desktops. In 2010 for the first time, smartphones outsold laptops.

We are entering a new technology age. But rather than calling it the "Post-PC Era," which is a negative way to name it, let's call it what it is: the Age of Mobilism. What's unique about this new Age of Mobilism is the use of technology to meet the deep-seated human need to be connected. How we develop connections to people, build friendships, and maintain relationships is very different in the Age of Mobilism. On Facebook and other social networking platforms, physical distance is no longer a barrier to making and maintaining friendships. Maintaining relationships, as always, still takes time, but the social technologies of the Age of Mobilism provide all manner of tools to help foster digital connections and relationships.

### Here Comes the Mobile Generation

In the vanguard, ushering in the Age of Mobilism, are today's youth. Digital Generation? How '90s. This is the Mobile Generation, which has, embedded in their palms, 24/7, a miraculously thin, aluminum-encased slab of glass called the mobile phone that they expertly wield to build and maintain multiple connections. Email is too slow in the Age of Mobilism; connections are now, are immediate. AT&T's former slogan "Reach out and touch someone" was prescient, but the company's new tagline, "Mobilize Everything," is spot on.

Mobilism is a global phenomenon. Just look around; there are people practicing mobilism everywhere—from the subway in Tokyo to the buses of Johannesburg,



South Africa, to the hotel lobby in Storm Lake, Iowa. In other parts of the world, we have witnessed in recent months youth using mobile devices and social media to bring down regimes and reform governments. Yet here in the United States, too often we ban these powerful technologies from school campuses. And to make us look even worse, South Korea has just announced that by 2015 no paper-based textbooks will be in use and all children will be in possession of a mobile device. (We are sure that the Koreans read our column in the April 2011 issue of *District Administration*, in which we predicted that all children in the United States would be using mobile learning devices by 2015, and they just wanted to scoop the United States.)

### Bifocal Generation vs. Mobile Generation

To be clear, tablets such as Apple's iPad, Motorola's Xoom and Samsung's Galaxy are definitely a type of mobile device. But they are "carry alongs," to use technology forecaster Mark Anderson's term. Unlike the virtual weightlessness of a smartphone, the heft alone—approximately 1.3 pounds—of a tablet means one must make a conscious effort to haul it about, unpack it for use and protect it from

abuse. Smartphones are "drop everywhere"; tablets are "drop once" devices, a less than desirable property for a mobile device. You read it here first: Tablets are running a lovely but second-place race in the Age of Mobilism.

But if we had a nickel for every time we heard adults say, "Kids need tablets for learning; those smartphones are too small," we would be rich! Yes, for the Bifocal Generation, a smartphone screen may be too small. But recall years ago how our children, eschewing their home TVs, flocked to that 2-inch square, black-and-white GameBoy just so they could have their games with them all the time, everywhere. And that device is positively primitive compared to what students are using today.

The Age of Mobilism is upon us. There is no going back. "The barbarians are at the gates" is not a productive way to see the impact of mobile technologies on your school. Learning in the Age of Mobilism is no longer confined to the classroom, to a teacher talking at the front of the room, to a textbook spilling out the gospel. All the time, everywhere learning is now the baseline norm, and we had better become accustomed to it. DA

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